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PALESTINIANS: National Council Session Ends

The concluding session of the Palestine National Council yesterday adopted a resolution that "refuses to consider" President Reagan's Middle East initiative but gives PLO chief Arafat flexibility to continue his efforts to link the PLO with the Middle East peace process through cooperation with Jordan. [redacted]

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Arafat in executive meetings had favored labeling the US initiative as "unacceptable," while radicals argued for explicit rejection. Arafat finally agreed to incorporate the compromise proposal in the draft submitted to the plenary session. [redacted]

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Arafat had his way on most other provisions of the resolution. It backs the concept of a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation but calls first for the creation of an independent Palestinian state. The resolution does not mention the formation of a negotiating team of Jordanians and non-PLO Palestinians. [redacted]

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The council endorsed the resolutions adopted by the Arab Summit last September in Fez but termed them "minimum" demands. Radical leaders had disputed Arafat's acceptance of the Fez proposals, which implicitly commit the Arab states to recognize Israel as part of a final Arab-Israeli settlement. [redacted]

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Arafat also is authorized to explore ways to improve relations with Egypt, provided Cairo shows signs of distancing itself from the Camp David accords. At the same time, he is charged with broadening contacts with Egyptian dissidents. [redacted]

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Comment: The meeting was largely a victory for Arafat over his radical opponents, who scored little more than a propaganda success in forcing him to compromise on the US initiative issue. Most of the delegates were willing to support Arafat's language, but he was unwilling to risk a split with the radicals. The other resolutions in effect allow Arafat to determine the PLO's next moves toward Jordan and toward the broader peace process. [redacted]

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His decisions now will be determined largely by his assessment of US willingness to press Israel for more accommodating policies on withdrawal from Lebanon and settlement activity in the West Bank. [redacted]

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INTERNATIONAL: Chemical Weapons Ban Initiative

The new US paper on a chemical weapons ban that has been presented to the 40-member UN Committee on Disarmament has placed the USSR on the defensive while gaining support from nonaligned states.

[redacted]

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Comment: The USSR has blocked discussion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban and other issues over the last month by haggling over procedures and by exploiting the rule of consensus with the aid of Mongolia, the current committee chairman. Many nonaligned delegates resent the Soviet obstructionism. US allies support the US initiative, although West Germany and a few others would prefer more rapid progress toward treaty negotiations. [redacted]

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The Soviets have lost the initiative they had last June when they proposed a draft chemical weapons treaty that Western and nonaligned members criticized for failure to make clear provision for verification. In time, they probably will allow the committee to establish a working group on chemical weapons with a mandate to begin drafting a proposed text this session, but only after trying to extract compensation on other issues. [redacted]

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OPEC: Discussions on Prices

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[REDACTED] Mexico has announced it will revise its oil price structure, retroactive to 1 February, and will reveal the new prices on Friday.

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Comment: Arab producers in the Persian Gulf almost certainly want to take some action on prices.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Mexico is likely to match the earlier cut for North Sea oil, which will add to the pressure for an early OPEC meeting because the price of Mexican oil directly affects Venezuelan oil prices. [REDACTED]

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FRANCE - MIDDLE EAST: Results of Cheysson's Trip

Foreign Minister Cheysson achieved little on his visits last week to Jordan, Iraq, and Syria. His brief talks in Amman dealt primarily with the situation in Lebanon. In Baghdad Cheysson failed to get the Iraqis to agree to a schedule for repayment of their large debt to France. [REDACTED]

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Comment: The main goal of Cheysson's trip was to try to provide some assistance for Iraq in its war with Iran, but he achieved nothing. The French have little leverage, despite their extensive arms sales in the area. The exchange of views with the Syrians helped reduce the strain in relations that has resulted from Syrian sponsorship of terrorism, France's support of Iraq, and Syria's close ties to the USSR. [REDACTED]

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PAKISTAN: Urban Violence Increases

Sunni mobs in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, have been attacking Shia mosques and businesses since Monday and have been clashing with police, who so far have arrested at least 200 demonstrators. The Army intervened yesterday; it is imposing a 22-hour curfew and closing all schools for two days. Sunni leaders are demanding President Zia fire the military governor of Sind Province for allegedly coddling the Shias and expel the Iranian Consul General, who is widely believed to have encouraged earlier Shia demonstrations. US officials report bombings of French installations in Karachi and in Lahore on Saturday do not appear related to the riots but also may have been inspired by Iranians. [redacted]

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Comment: Zia's political opponents apparently are waiting to see if he can control the disturbances before deciding whether to exploit the current unrest. The martial law government, although never widely popular, has earned considerable respect for its ability to maintain order. The violence is a major test of its continued effectiveness, and any sign of weakness could embolden Zia's foes to join forces against him. [redacted]

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USSR-AFGHANISTAN: Troop Request Rejected

The Indian Ambassador in Kabul says the USSR has rejected an Afghan request for more Soviet troops. The Soviets reportedly stated that more troops are unnecessary at this time but that they will provide whatever equipment and training are required to expand the Afghan armed forces. [redacted]

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Comment: The Soviets in recent months have made a few small increases in their force of about 100,000 men. The new leadership in Moscow may be reexamining the problem and may consider further increases. [redacted]
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UK: Difficult Byelection for Labor

The byelection tomorrow for the traditionally Labor-held seat in Bermondsey in east London is an important test for Labor Party leader Foot. The contest pits two Labor candidates--the party's selection and an "independent"--against each other. It also features a Liberal representing the Social Democratic - Liberal Alliance, a Conservative, and the nominees of several small parties.

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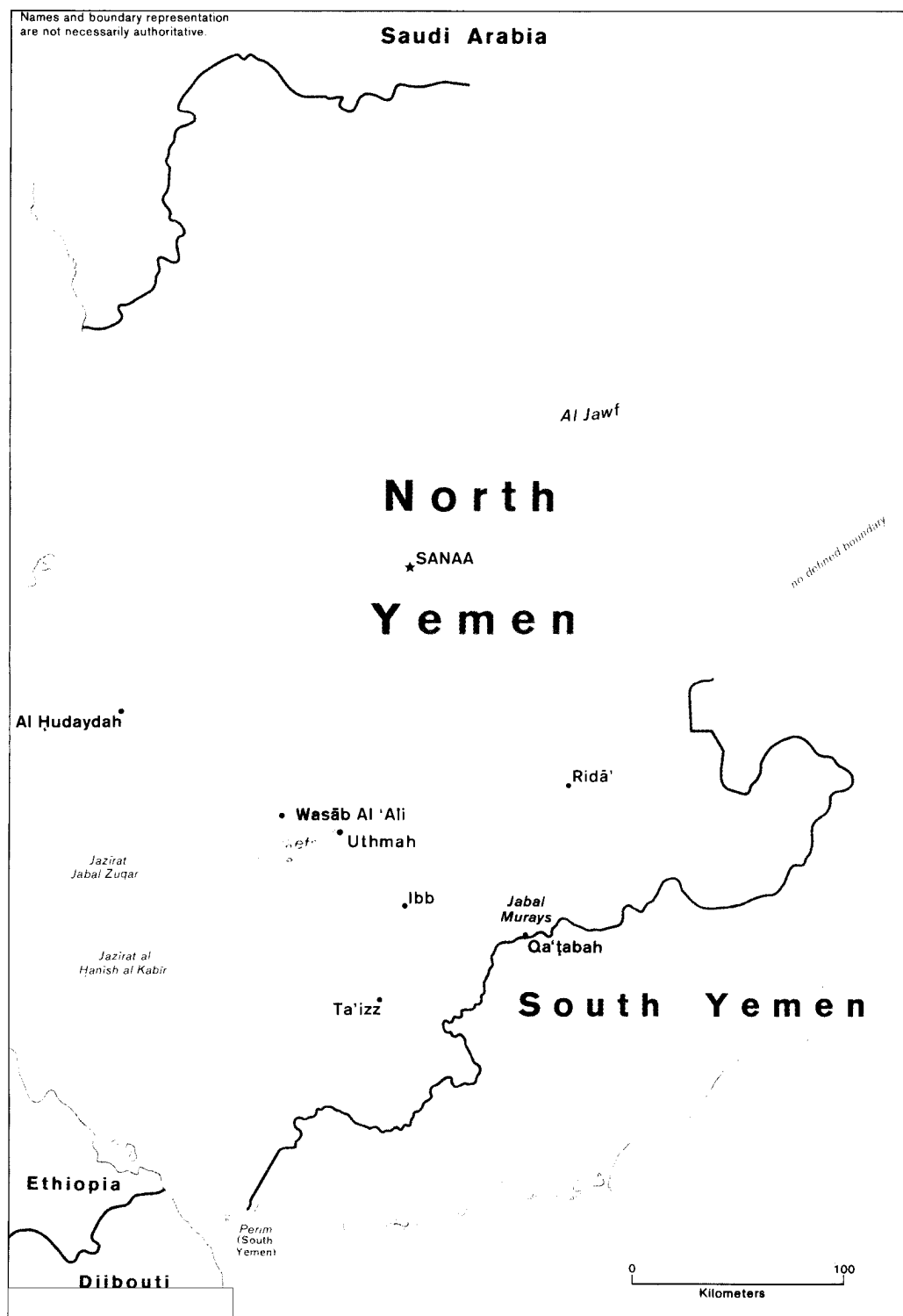
Comment: The officially endorsed Labor candidate probably has an edge, but the vote is likely to be badly splintered. The official Labor candidate is a hardline leftist whom Foot once said he would never support; the "independent" is a moderate who has asked that, if he wins, he be allowed to join Labor's parliamentary delegation--a move certain to be resisted by the party's left wing. Loss of the solidly Labor seat to one of the other candidates would humiliate Foot and raise new doubts about his leadership of the party.

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NORTH YEMEN: Increasing Pressure on Insurgents

North Yemen continues to build up its forces surrounding the enclave controlled by National Democratic Front insurgents in the Jabal Murays area and is strengthening bases near the border with South Yemen [redacted]

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[redacted] US Embassy officials who recently toured the area east of Ibb, which was under Front control until last summer, report growing popular support for the government. Nevertheless, a few Front holdouts west of the Sanaa-Taizz road have launched small-scale attacks on government troops. [redacted]

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Comment: The buildup increases pressure on the insurgents in the Jabal Murays area, the only remaining Front stronghold. Even though a third of Sanaa's military forces are in the south, the government should have little trouble containing scattered Front resistance elsewhere as long as Aden continues to curtail its support to the insurgents. [redacted]

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USSR-MOZAMBIQUE: Machel To Visit Moscow

Pravda has announced Mozambican President Machel will make a working visit to the USSR early next month.

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[REDACTED] Machel will meet twice with General Secretary Andropov. [REDACTED]

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Comment: Andropov's meetings with Machel will mark his first official talks with an African head of state. The Soviet leader probably will discuss some of the recommendations of the high-level Soviet military aid delegation that visited Mozambique last December. In addition, Andropov is likely to urge Machel to lobby hard at the Nonaligned Summit for pro-Soviet causes.

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CUBA: Status of Debt Rescheduling

Cuba's government creditors expect debt rescheduling negotiations to be completed by early March, according to the US Embassy in Madrid. Official creditors, however, are showing some apprehension that the US might attempt to participate by reviving its claims on some pre-Castro debts, which they believe would impede discussions. Cuba indicates it will not sit at the same table with the US. [REDACTED]

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Comment: Successful rescheduling probably would somewhat ease Cuba's ability to obtain short-term credits, thereby facilitating hard currency trade. Convertible currency constraints will persist, however, and force Cuba to continue buying less from the West. This, in turn, will lead to reduced economic growth and increased austerity. [REDACTED]

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Special Analysis

CUBA-SURINAME: Havana's Intentions

Cuba's strategy for exploiting the current political turmoil in Suriname appears to be focusing on key long-range tasks to help consolidate Army Commander Bouterse's revolution. The Cubans want to establish some form of grass-roots support for the revolution, including the creation of a propaganda apparatus to politicize the population. Meanwhile, they are helping to organize an armed paramilitary force to prevent a counterrevolution and ensure a continuation of the swing to the left. The Cubans are seeking to create in Suriname another radical regime that features hostility toward the US as the basic precept of its foreign policy. [redacted]

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The Cubans evidently are more interested in the revolutionary process that Bouterse has unleashed than in him personally. Although they are quick to take advantage of his readiness to heed their advice, they appear to consider him a somewhat inept opportunist.

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Moreover, Bouterse does not have the solid Marxist-Leninist foundation that is required to assure the Cubans' long-term support. As a result, they probably would not hesitate to shift their support to a more promising and politically reliable leader. [redacted]

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In the past two months, Cuban officials have indicated to Western diplomats that Havana believes Bouterse has no recognizable political philosophy other than doing whatever is necessary to maintain himself in power. One diplomat, for example, quoted a top Cuban party official as saying that Bouterse should be thought of as an "accident" on Suriname's path to decolonization. [redacted]

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The Cubans clearly regarded the execution on 8 December of 15 of the regime's opponents as a major blunder on Bouterse's part and have tried to disassociate themselves from the incident. Although the killings did lead to a reduction of Western influence in Suriname, they also undermined any progress Bouterse might have made in developing popular support and provoked the withdrawal of important foreign assistance. [redacted]

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Backing the Revolution

Despite Bouterse's drawbacks, Havana views him as a convenient vehicle through which another pro-Cuban regime can be created. The Cubans are continuing to try to strengthen Bouterse's position and have concentrated on building popular support for him. In recent months Cuban Ambassador Cardenas seems to have been casting about for some readily available institutional framework that might serve to mobilize such support. [redacted]

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As Cardenas attempts to shape new institutions and radicalize old ones in Suriname, he almost certainly will try to avoid linking them too closely to Bouterse personally. Instead, he will try to tie them to a left-ist political philosophy so that any shift in allegiance could be accomplished with minimum damage to the revolution. [redacted]

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Cardenas has done better in the field of propaganda, an area that Havana apparently views as vital. [redacted]

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Havana also probably will try to develop a native paramilitary force to defend or promote Cuban interests. The most likely candidate is the small, pro-Cuban Revolutionary People's Party. [redacted]

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The party already controls the media and dominates the small paramilitary group of Bouterse supporters called the People's Militia. [redacted]

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Promoting Anti-US Activity

Cuba will measure its success in Suriname largely in terms of increased Surinamese hostility toward the US. This yardstick will remain a constant in Havana's cultivation of Bouterse or any other Surinamese leader.

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Cardenas and other Cuban officials will work hard to ensure that Suriname increasingly adopts an anti-US posture.

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